

Connecticut Historical Society  
**museum & library**

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2 March 2012

Dear Co-Chairmen Fleischmann and Stillman, and Members of the Education Committee:

As the Archivist at The Connecticut Historical Society, 1 Elizabeth Street in Hartford I am writing in support of HB 5355, An Act Concerning Museum Property. This act will give libraries, museums, historic sites and other heritage organizations in the state the necessary tool to obtain clear title to items that have been in their possession for years; it is an issue we all face.

For example, in 1844 Esther M. Chester deposited at the Connecticut Historical Society Burr family papers, dating from 1741-1796. There never was an official transfer of ownership so conceivably Ms. Chester's heirs could come and reclaim their property. For the past 168, the Society has expended staff resources and overhead to protect, catalog (in 2009) and care for that material. Other deposits or loans with no clear title and of more recent vintage also take up valuable resources. The owner moves and leaves no forwarding address, or a woman gets married or divorced and changes her name. We have no effective means to track that person down.

An Act Concerning Museum Property (HB 5355) would give the Connecticut Historical Society and other similar institutions (libraries, museums, archives, historic sites, etc.) in the state the mechanism for clearing title to deposits and other items left by donors or lenders and never retrieved. Items and collections without clear title drain limited resources and tie the staff's hands when they wish to transfer the material to a more appropriate repository or remove it from the collection. Museums take their responsibility to care for materials for the public good very seriously. HB 5355 would enable these institutions to carry out those responsibilities and make more collections publicly available.

Sincerely,



Barbara Austen  
Archivist